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Campus Free Speech: The Pillar of a Democracy

Our goal as legislators is not to micro-manage public university campuses, but to establish a basic framework of rules that an appointed Board of Regents act upon. Because the very fabric of our society is based upon liberty and freedom, especially within the tenets of the 1st amendment, it is imperative that our institutions of higher education remain the free marketplace of ideas.

Within a decade of the ratification of the 1st amendment and throughout the history of our nation, there have been numerous attempts to stifle the freedom of expression from progressive *and* conservative ideologies – with the ultimate goal of forcing an orthodoxy, or point of view, for political and social gain: laws to jail opponents of a political party's ideology, to silence abolitionists, to prevent *immoral speech* during the Victorian era, and even *black laws* to prevent the free speech of a particular race. Simply because an idea may be distasteful, disgusting, vulgar or offensive though, does not make that idea illegal. This is simply the foundation of free expression and the open exchange of ideas. For instance, the 1949 Supreme Court stated that:

"The function of free speech under our system of government is to invite dispute. It may indeed best serve its high purpose when it induces a condition of unrest, creates dissatisfaction with conditions as they are, or even stirs people to anger."

In recent decades, attacks on free expression have become commonplace and in-vogue at institutions where ideas and truths should be challenged – the American university. This most recent degradation has been at the behest of the leftist elite who promote their own progressive, opinionated beliefs as gospel while touting a bumper sticker slogan of *coexist*. Ironically, free expression that has been removed from the college public square in an attempt to shield young, apparently fragile, yet critically thinking adults as offensive, has by its very nature become offensive. Attempts to stifle certain types of expression through designated "Free Speech Zones" or "Bias Response Protocols" insult the very intelligence of all college students and demean the academic community as a whole.

In short, our societal freedoms demand that it is not within the scope, nor the right, of any taxpayer funded university to shield college adults from constitutionally protected free speech.

It is high time that American universities maintain neutrality on the public policy controversies of the day. Invited speakers shall be allowed to speak freely and without interference, regardless of ideology, and Wisconsin's institutions must have rules in place to ensure that faculty and students are not mandated to publicly express a given views on social policy, but rather, to openly challenge popular, politically-correct opinions and *truths*.